

Summer Road Trip(s) by PaperBodies

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Summary:

Billy gets the idea the day Timothy calls to say that he's not coming home for the summer. Ellie's been working in New York for a couple of years now, and Sarah called three weeks ago to share that she was selected to participate in a research trip this summer, but they had been counting on having their baby back home from his freshman year of college. Billy watches Steve's face crumble a little even as he keeps his tone excited to match Tim's.

Billy finds places to stay and places to eat all up and down the West Coast. At first, he tries to keep the itinerary as close to the original as possible, and then he remembers that they were young and stupid and they both had money but were trying not to spend it, and he stops worrying about it. He's confident the route will communicate what he wants it to.

1. Day 14: Road Trip

Billy gets the idea the day Timothy calls to say that he's not coming home for the summer. Ellie's been working in New York for a couple of years now, and Sarah called three weeks ago to share that she was selected to participate in a research trip this summer, but they had been counting on having their baby back home from his freshman year of college. Billy watches Steve's face crumble a little even as he keeps his tone excited to match Tim's.

"It sounds like a great opportunity, kiddo. Of course we're happy for you." Steve listens for a few minutes and then laughs. "Hey, your dad and I managed on our own for a while before you three came along. I think we can handle it."

Eventually, Steve passes the phone to Billy so he can hear about the summer program that's got Tim so excited. After Billy hangs up, he finds Steve tucked into the breakfast nook, hands wrapped around a mug, staring into space. He sits down across from Steve.

"We knew they were going to go off and live their lives eventually," Billy says. Steve sighs a little sadly.

"I know. For some reason, I just thought we had more time." He looks at Billy and smiles. "It went so fast, you know?" Billy nods. He does know. It seems like yesterday that they had three kids under seven all at the same time. He misses it, and he doesn't. But he looks at Steve's face, still a little sad, and he has the idea. He knows what they're doing for the summer, while their kids are off making their own lives.

Billy spends the next couple of weeks planning. They both retired early thanks to Billy's government payout and Steve's trust fund and frankly uncanny ability to anticipate what the stock market is going to do, so the logistics are easy. There are no vacation days to navigate, no employers to talk to. And even with two kids in college, they don't have to worry about what the trip is going to cost. Billy finds places to stay and places to eat all up and down the West Coast. At first, he tries to keep the itinerary as close to the original as possible, and then he remembers that they were young and stupid

and they both had money but were trying not to spend it, and he stops worrying about it. He's confident the route will communicate what he wants it to. As the finishing touch, he reserves a muscle car at the rental place. It's not quite the same, but it's a lot closer than their SUV.

Billy times it perfectly. He tells Steve about the trip three days before they're supposed to leave, which gives Steve time to raise a number of increasingly ridiculous objections, most of which Billy is prepared for. Steve's anxiety peaks on day three, but Billy is ready for that too. By the time Billy is pulling up in front of their house in the rented car, Steve is just as excited as he is.

The first part of the drive is quiet, the windows down, both of them content to enjoy the summer breeze and the morning sunlight. Steve shoots Billy a smile as they pull onto the highway, but it isn't until they hit the coast at Torrey Pines that either one of them says anything.

"Want to stop?" Billy asks, and Steve smiles.

"I feel like we should, for old times' sake." Billy reaches over to take Steve's hand, and then he nods and exits the highway.

Billy didn't say anything as he pulled into a parking spot. It was after dark, so there were plenty of spaces available. He opened his door almost before he had turned off the car, eager to escape the tense silence inside. Steve stepped out more slowly, staring ahead at where the waves were lit with moonlight. Billy's eyes burned as he closed his door with just a little more force than was strictly necessary and stalked over to a set of steps leading down to the water. He stripped off his shoes and socks and kept walking until his toes hit wet sand. He stood there and waited for the next wave, sucking in a breath despite himself when the water hit his ankles. It was cold and grounding and he felt tears slipping down his face. He stood there and let the ocean soak the hems of his jeans, wondering how exactly he had managed to fuck this up so thoroughly in just a handful of days.

Steve watched Billy walk down to the beach. He hesitated, wondering if he should follow, and then rolled his eyes at himself. If the last few days had taught him anything, it was that following Billy Hargrove out of Hawkins in the first place had probably a mistake. He slid carefully onto the hood of the restored Camaro and watched as Billy stared out at the water.

It was a long time before Billy came back to the car, so Steve had time to do a lot of thinking. He didn't say anything when Billy slid onto the hood next to him and lit a cigarette. He accepted it a moment later, when Billy held it out. He sighed and tried not to wonder if it meant anything.

"You can drop me off at a bus station," Steve said at the same time that Billy blurted out "I'm sorry." They stared at each other for a long moment, and then Billy's shoulders went tight.

"No, of course," he said. "You want to go back." His words were bitter, but Steve didn't get the feeling it was directed at him.

"Come on, man," he said softly. "It's pretty clear you regret asking me to come with you." There was a long silence. "I mean, I get it," Steve added when Billy didn't say anything. "It's not like we're best friends." Billy frowned at him.

"I don't regret asking you to come, Harrington," he said, as if that should have been obvious.

"Then what the fuck, man?" Steve asked, throwing his hands out, suddenly unable to suppress his frustration. "You've either been snapping at me or giving me one-word answers for days. It's pretty clear I pissed you off somewhere along the way from Indiana to here." Billy sighed and looked back out at the Pacific Ocean.

"It's not you," Billy finally said. Steve shook his head.

"Heard that one before," he said, mostly to himself. Billy looked over at him.

"Seriously. It's not like that. I just..." Billy trailed off and thought about how to say this. For some reason, he wanted Steve to

understand. “For a long time, getting back here was my only goal. And a lot of shit has changed since I first showed up in Hawkins—“ Steve snorted at that particular understatement— “but that stayed the same. And the closer we got to California, the more I started wondering what happens next.” Steve looked at him, not sure he was following. “I mean long-term,” Billy clarified. “Sure, I have to be back in Hawkins in a few months to check in, but I won’t have to do that forever.” There was a long pause. “And I never thought I’d get this far, so I haven’t really thought about what happens next.” Steve could relate. His life plan was pretty thoroughly fucked at this point. He took another drag on the cigarette and passed it back to Billy.

“If it makes you feel any better,” he said, staring out at the water, “I’m pretty sure no one with a stellar life plan hops into a car with the dude who beat their face in to take off on a spontaneous road trip for the whole summer.” Billy stared at him for several long seconds. Then a smile spread over his face.

“You wound me, Harrington,” he said with exaggerated hurt. “I thought we were making progress, but you still just think of me as the dude who beat your face in.” He shook his head sadly. “All of those shared cigarettes, and for what?” Steve was shaking his head, but Billy could see the hint of a smile at the corners of his mouth.

“Hey, fuck you, you did beat my face in,” Steve said, but there was no bite in it. Billy had, after all, apologized eventually. And sincerely. And had maybe been the reason Steve had actually graduated. “But fine, Max is actually cool, so you can be Max’s dickhead brother, if that works better for you.” Steve offered.

“Stepbrother,” Billy corrected automatically, and Steve smirked at him.

“Max’s dickhead stepbrother it is,” he said.

“Unbelievable,” Billy said with a huff. “See if I waste any more cigarettes on you,” he added, as he passed the cigarette back to Steve. They shared the rest of it and watched the water, and then they got in the car and started looking for a place to stay. Steve didn’t bring up the bus station again.

The sun is high in the sky this time, and they walk down the stairs and out onto the sand together. They slip off their sandals and carry them as they wander toward the water. It's crowded instead of deserted, and Steve's hand is warm and familiar in his, but Billy still remembers standing on this beach in the moonlight, feeling completely unmoored, worried about his future but more worried that Steve Harrington was going to disappear, vanish from his life the way good things always did. He remembers almost forgetting how to breathe, and his desperate relief when he woke up the next morning and Steve was still there, sleeping in the other bed in their motel room, real and the only solid thing Billy could think of, at the time.

He squeezes Steve's hand a little tighter now, and Steve leans in to bump his shoulder against Billy's. Billy wonders if part of him will always be nineteen, staring at the ocean in the darkness and wondering how long he can get away with keeping Steve Harrington close before the universe notices.

Steve's shoulders are more relaxed when they get back in the car, and Billy knows then that the trip is going to be a success.

Three leisurely days later, Billy pulls into the driveway of a beach house in Santa Barbara. Steve raises an eyebrow.

"No car camping this time?" he asks, lightly teasing. Billy snorts.

"It was only car camping because I was with rich bitch Steve Harrington. If I had been by myself, I'm sure it would have been a misdemeanor of some kind." Steve laughs, and Billy continues. "You're more than welcome to sleep in the car, baby," he says, "but I'm staying in a nice, comfy bed." Steve smiles at him.

"Not sleeping anywhere without you, B," he murmurs as he presses a quick, casual kiss to Billy's temple. Then he grabs his bag and wanders toward the front door, leaving Billy a little breathless from the casual affection. He knows it's ridiculous—they've been together for decades—so he blames the fluttering feeling in his chest on

nostalgia and walks around to get the rest of their stuff out of the trunk.

The beach house is everything Billy hoped for and more. They eat dinner on the balcony overlooking the ocean. They split a bottle of wine and get a little giggly from it and wonder when their tolerance abandoned them so completely. They take a moonlit walk on the beach and glance at the condo complex at the far end of it, which used to be a campground. Neither one of them says anything about it, but they press closer together as they walk.

Billy came back to the car with a truly impressive scowl on his face.

“There’s some fucking festival. Every hotel in town is booked solid. She said there’s a bunch of festivals this time of year, so we’ll probably have the same problem in the next place we stop.” Billy paused and sighed. “She said our best bet is to find a campground. She gave me directions to a couple.” Steve raised an eyebrow.

“You don’t have a tent in here that I don’t know about, right?” Billy shook his head.

“No, but we can sleep in the car if we have to.” Steve stretched out his long legs in the limited space in the footwell. He looked like he wanted to say something, but he finally just nodded.

“Ok,” he said.

There were no spaces available at the first place they checked, but the second one had two spots left. They picked the one closer to the beach and ate a couple of burgers while they watched the sun set over the water. They managed to find a configuration in the Camaro that made it halfway possible for them both to get some sleep—Billy stretched out across the backseat, and Steve in the fully reclined passenger seat—and they went to bed pretty early. Or they tried to, anyway. It turned out that it could get surprisingly chilly at the beach at night, even in the summer. Steve grabbed some jackets and sweatshirts out of the trunk, but they didn’t seem to help. Billy listened to Steve tossing and turning for a long time, until he was

pretty sure he heard his teeth chattering, and then he sighed.

“Just get back here, Harrington.” There was a pause.

“What?” Steve asked, a little surprised and possibly a little defensive.

“You’re freezing your ass off up there, even with the jacket. Just get back here. I run hot, and I’m sick of listening to you trying to get comfortable.”

“Sorry,” Steve said, after a long pause, but he didn’t move. Billy was pretty sure he was going to stay exactly where he was. He sighed and shifted, trying to get more comfortable, and then the passenger seat shifted upwards and Steve scrambled inelegantly into the back. He was all long limbs and freezing hands, and Billy hissed as those hands touched his exposed arms under the jean jacket he was using as a blanket.

“Jesus Christ,” Billy muttered as Steve flopped over him. He grabbed Steve by the arms and flipped them both, so he was on top of Steve.

“What the fuck,” Steve said flatly, eyes wide as he stared up at Billy. Billy grinned at him.

“You’re technically slightly taller and also freezing, so you get to be the pillow. Now shut up and go to sleep.” Billy expected Steve to argue, but he just wriggled around for a while, trying to get comfortable, and then settled not a moment too soon. A little longer of Steve writhing around under him, and his feelings were going to become entirely too obvious. Billy expected to lay awake for a long time, distracted by Steve stretched out under him, but sleep came for him surprisingly quickly.

Billy woke up with his face pressed into Steve’s neck. He took a couple of deep breaths, warm and comfortable and content, and then he froze as he registered the hardness pressing into his hip. He raised his head slowly, hardly daring to breathe, and was relieved to see that Steve was still asleep. He had one arm tossed over his face, and one arm tucked into the back of Billy’s shirt. His hand was warm against Billy’s back. Billy started to ease away, hoping that he could maybe extricate himself without rousing Steve, but Steve made a

little snuffling noise and his arm tightened around Billy. Billy sighed. He didn't want to embarrass Steve by making him wake up underneath Billy with a seemingly pretty impressive erection, but he also couldn't see a way around that. He stared out at the faint dawn light for a few minutes, not sure what exactly to do here. Then Steve shifted underneath him, and Billy realized he was waking up.

He turned his head to meet Steve's sleepy gaze, which was a mistake. It made Billy want to stroke his hair, and snuggle back into his neck, and keep him here, warm and sleepy and surprisingly comfortable, forever. Then Steve's eyes went wide and his face went red.

"Um," he said eloquently. Billy had no idea what to say in this situation, so he shifted and Steve pulled his hand out of the back of his shirt. Billy missed the warmth of his hand immediately.

"Gotta piss," Billy said, and bolted for the driver's side door. He stayed outside to smoke a cigarette, staring out at the waves coming in. Steve joined him several minutes later. They stood side by side without speaking for a while, listening to the waves and the seabirds calling to each other.

"Breakfast?" Billy finally said, and Steve looked over at him for the first time.

"Sure," he said uncertainly. Billy kept his face as neutral as possible. He certainly wasn't going to bring it up, and he desperately hoped that Steve wouldn't either.

"How do you feel about waffles?" Billy asked, and he watched Steve's shoulders come down from around his ears a little bit.

"I feel great about waffles," Steve said, a little more confidently. So they had waffles. And they definitely didn't talk about it.

"These are still amazing waffles," Steve says, and Billy refrains from pointing out that Steve's plate is realistically mostly whipped cream at this point. "I can't believe this place is still here."

"I can't either," Billy agrees, though the perfect hash browns are

probably enough to have kept it in business on their own. There's pause while Steve finishes his whipped cream.

"So are we doing all the stops from the Harrington-Hargrove extravaganza of '87?" Steve asks, voice warm and a little amused. Billy grins at him.

"First of all, that is absolutely not what we're calling it. And you'll just have to wait and see, won't you, baby?" Steve's answering smile is brighter than the sun. They do not come to an agreement about what they're calling it.

2. Days 15-16: Sun, nostalgia

Summary for the Chapter:

The road trip continues!

They stay at the beach house in Santa Barbara for three nights before they move on to Monterey. There, they stay at an elegant little hotel built to look like a French chateau. Their suite is luxurious and the food at the restaurant is incredible. Billy watches Steve moan his way through a tasting menu and then takes him upstairs so that he can moan his way through dessert too. Well, second dessert.

They go to the beach and the aquarium and they go look at the golf course, but they don't play. Steve can—he's still pretty good at it, actually—but he rarely does. Billy knows why, was there for the acrimonious divorce, and the second family, and the brittle, painful silence that preceded Steve's dad's death. Billy still hates him, hopes he's burning in hell right next to Neil. Two fathers who couldn't, or wouldn't, be what their sons needed. *Fuck them*, Billy thinks, and suggests they call their kids that afternoon to check in.

On the second night they eat incredible tacos, and Steve is quiet on the way home. He doesn't speak up until they're walking toward the beach, before they go back to their room. Steve slips his hand into Billy's as they walk. He's been fidgety since they left the restaurant, which means he's thinking hard about something. He'll bring it up, if Billy gives him the space. So Billy looks up at the sky and listens to the sound of the surf and waits.

"I'm having a really good time," Steve finally says. "You did an amazing job planning this trip." There's a question coming, and Billy thinks he knows what it is. "Don't take this the wrong way, B, but what are we doing? And why now?" Billy thinks about it. He isn't worried—Steve will wait until he finds the right way to say it—but he wants Steve to understand something he's not sure he understands himself yet. So he deflects, a little, knowing Steve will hear the request for more time underneath. He shrugs.

"We're taking a road trip, Bambi. And I thought we could use the

break.” There was a time when that response would have hurt Steve, when he would have interpreted Billy’s need for more time to get it right in his head as a lack of trust, a lack of transparency. That time passed years ago.

“Okay,” Steve says, squeezing Billy’s hand. “Well it’s a really good road trip the second time, too.” Billy thinks about it for the rest of their walk, and over the next couple of days while they hike, and go whale watching, and take drives along the coast. He’s getting closer to what he wants to say, what he wants Steve to understand about what all of this is for.

They did, in fact, run into the exact same problem in Monterey. It was the same story with the festival and the fully booked hotels, only this time, every campground they checked was full. Billy sighed when they got back in the car at the last campground.

“Now what?” he asked, mostly rhetorically.

“Maybe it’s time to change our approach,” Steve said. Billy looked at him and raised his eyebrows. Steve sighed and gestured toward the row of brightly-lit luxury hotels along the water that were visible through the windshield.

“You want to blow half of our trip budget on a couple of nights in Monterey,” Billy said, voice thick with disbelief.

“Okay, first of all,” Steve said, “Max told me what your face looked like when you found out what kind of hush money the government was willing to pay you, so don’t pretend you can’t afford it—” Billy frowned and cut him off.

“That money’s for my *future*, Harrington,” he said piously. “I’m saving it so I can invest it.”

“And secondly,” Steve continued, as though Billy hadn’t spoken, “I have a credit card. For emergencies.” Billy stared at him for a long moment, and Steve wondered, briefly, if he was about to get angry, to ask why he was only just hearing about the credit card now. But

Billy just started the car and drove to the first hotel, right on the beach. They didn't have any rooms left, but the second place had a deluxe room available.

"There's a seafood festival this weekend," the woman at the front desk told him, "so you're lucky we had a cancellation this afternoon. It's for the Terrace Suite," she said, looking from Steve to Billy and back again. Steve made some kind of noise of agreement. He didn't ask how much it was going to cost. She talked him through the amenities—the fireplace, the hot tub, the updated bathroom—and Steve nodded along without hearing any of it. He was too busy fighting back a growing feeling of dread to listen. Because Billy was eventually going to ask about the card. And even if he didn't, Steve had basically just confirmed every taunting thing Billy had ever said to him. Steve Harrington: spoiled little rich boy. Handed every advantage. Somehow still couldn't figure his shit out.

Steve led the way up to their room in silence. It wasn't until he opened the door that he realized that the suite contained only one—albeit very large—bed. Steve tried to care, but he couldn't. He was too busy waiting for Billy to comment. Waiting for him to realize, like everyone eventually did, that Steve had everything and still couldn't get his life together. That Steve, unlike Billy, had no real excuse for his complete lack of a future. But no comment ever came.

Instead, Billy wandered around the room, checking out the fireplace and the massive shower and the terrace, which did indeed contain a hot tub. Billy wasted absolutely no time getting into it, and he didn't bother with swim trunks. He only got out of it, reluctantly, when Steve announced that food had arrived. He had ordered room service, figuring the damage was already done, and a truly staggering amount of food was wheeled into the room on a cart. There was a single red rose in a vase on it, and Steve wanted to disappear. Billy watched him a little warily as they ate, but he didn't say anything until they were watching TV, full and stretched out side-by-side on the bed.

"Are your parents going to be mad?" he asked hesitantly, and it took a minute for Steve to react. That wasn't the question he had been expecting. He thought about lying. He thought it might be nice to pretend, just briefly, that he had parents who cared enough about him to get mad about something he did. But then he thought about

Billy's face on the beach in San Diego, and the way he had given Steve an out in Santa Barbara, and he didn't want to fracture whatever fragile thing was starting to exist between them.

"No," Steve said. "They probably won't even notice." His voice was as neutral as he could get it. Billy frowned, like he couldn't understand how that was possible, and Steve shrugged. "Some assistant pays the credit card bills, I think. They've never asked any questions."

"So they don't..." Billy trailed off, like he wasn't sure how he wanted to end that sentence. Steve sighed.

"They probably don't even know I'm not in Hawkins," he said evenly. "And there is very little chance that they're going to find out, between now and August." Billy's eyebrows went up at that.

"What the fuck, Harrington?" Steve wasn't sure what, exactly, that was in response to, so he just took a breath and continued talking.

"I'm sorry. That I didn't mention the card before. I just..." Steve closed his eyes. "I didn't want you to know that I'm exactly who you thought I was." He laughed a little bitterly. "The spoiled rich kid who has everything." He gestured at the luxury suite around them.

"I don't give a shit about that," Billy said firmly, and Steve's eyes snapped open. Billy waved a hand impatiently but he looked sincere, his brow furrowed. "Go back to the part where your parents aren't going to find out that you're gone for an entire summer," he said. "How the fuck is that possible?" Steve stared at him, confused.

"They don't really come back to Hawkins anymore?" Steve offered.

"Since when?" Billy asked, still frowning.

"Uh..." Steve had to think about it. "Since my junior year of high school?" He thought that was right. It might have been longer. He couldn't remember exactly when they stopped coming home for Christmas.

"And they don't call you," Billy said a little incredulously.

"No?" It came out as a question, but Steve was sure. They didn't. He

had called them a few times, but they had either hurried off the phone or never returned the message, so he had stopped trying eventually.

“So when Robin said she couldn’t come on this trip because her parents would freak, and you said ‘must be nice,’ you actually meant that.” Steve flushed. Why did Billy remember that? Still, he tried to answer honestly.

“I mean, I don’t think I would actually enjoy having my parents be upset with me,” Steve said. The next part was harder to get out. He looked at the TV instead of at Billy. “But at least it would be a reaction, I guess.” He tried not to sound pathetic, and probably failed. But Billy didn’t laugh at him. There was a long silence, and when Steve dared to glance at him, Billy looked angry. When he saw Steve looking at him, his expression softened. Then he smiled.

“So your parents don’t check the card statements, huh?”

“Nope,” Steve said, not sure where this was going.

“So if we got charged for the contents of the mini-bar, for example, they wouldn’t necessarily notice that.” Steve gave Billy an answering grin.

“They would not,” he confirmed.

“Excellent,” Billy said, “because we’re going to clean out the minibar and we’re taking it all back out to the hot tub.”

“But Billy,” Steve said, eyes wide with mock sincerity, “we can’t go in the water because it hasn’t been half an hour since we ate.” Billy huffed a laugh.

“Relax, pretty boy. I’m a lifeguard, remember? You’ll be in absolutely no danger.” Steve looked at Billy Hargrove smiling at him, the corners of his eyes creased with genuine amusement, and his heart stuttered in his chest; Billy had no idea how wrong he was.

The next morning, Steve woke up slowly. He was warm, and

comfortable, and the dim pre-dawn light coming in through the sliding door to the terrace suggested that it was far too early to be awake. He shifted and stretched, and then froze as a heavy arm tightened around his waist. Billy made a soft sound of protest and tucked his face further into the back of Steve's neck. Then he also froze. Steve waited for Billy to pull away, and for a long moment, neither of them moved. Then Billy's thumb traced a slow line across Steve's stomach, and Steve's breath hitched. Deliberately, Steve turned so they were facing each other, and Billy's warm hand was planted low on his back. They stared at each other for a long moment. In the first light of morning, with the sound of the waves and the cries of seabirds coming in from where the sliding door was cracked open, it felt like everyone else in the world had ceased to exist. The only thing that was real was the beach, and this bed, and the two of them curled together in it.

Steve brought a careful hand up and slowly brushed the curls off of Billy's forehead. To his surprise, Billy let him, watching him with a little wariness in his blue eyes. Steve dropped his eyes to Billy's lips. Emboldened, he leaned in slowly, giving Billy plenty of time to stop him. Billy didn't stop him. Instead, he turned his head a little to give Steve a better angle, and the first tentative press of their lips quickly gave way to something more heated. Steve gasped as that ridiculous tongue slid across his lower lip, and then that tongue was in his mouth, doing something that seemed complicated and felt incredible. Steve moaned and wrapped an arm around Billy's neck, pulling him closer. He ran his other hand down Billy's side, hesitating at the waistband of his sweats.

"Can I?" He pulled back far enough to ask, and made a frankly embarrassing noise when Billy turned his attention to Steve's neck, kissing and nipping at the sensitive skin.

"God yes," Billy replied, sliding his own hand into the back of Steve's pajama pants. It was Billy's turn to moan when Steve slid his hand into the back of his sweats and pulled their hips flush together. Billy pulled his hand out of Steve's pants and rolled them so he was straddling Steve, his hands braced on either side of Steve's head. Then he rolled his hips in a sinuous circle and smirked at Steve's sharp inhale. Steve's hands tightened on Billy's ass as he planted his

feet on the mattress and rocked his own hips up.

“I think we should—*ah*—stay here another night,” Steve said after a few long moments where they moved together without speaking. Billy raised an eyebrow as he paused the slide of his hips against Steve’s.

“You know how much this room costs, right?” he asked. Steve just shrugged.

“Might as well use my parents’ complete lack of interest in my life to do something fun, right?” He smirked at Billy’s gasp as he rolled up again. “Besides, do *you* want to get out of this bed anytime soon so we can check out and get back on the road?” Billy leaned down to kiss him, slowly and thoroughly.

“I don’t,” he said, starting up the movement of his hips again. Shortly after that he pulled back long enough to shuck his own sweats and get Steve out of his pajama pants, and then the conversation was definitely over.

It’s not until they’re on the road again, winding their way further up the coast, that Billy brings it up.

“That road trip changed my life,” he says quietly, reaching out to turn down the radio. Steve smiles over at him, and rests his hand over Billy’s on the gearshift.

“Mine too,” he says. “In the best way.” Billy nods in agreement, and then continues.

“But it was also terrifying. I spent most of that trip scared out of my mind. Scared that I wouldn’t figure my life out. Scared that something would happen and I’d have to go back to Hawkins and the lab. Scared that you would leave. Even after Monterey, I was scared I was going to fuck it up, that you would decide that it just wasn’t worth it to be with me. When I think back on that trip, I remember eating tacos on the beach, and that fancy-ass suite with the hot tub, and the sun on our faces, and I also remember how dark it seemed

sometimes, how sure I was that I wasn't going to get to keep any of it." He turns to look over, and Steve is watching him, eyes soft on his face.

"Yeah," he agrees, a little hoarsely. "I really didn't expect you to stay." Billy turns his hand over so he can lace their fingers together.

"So," he continues, "I thought it might be nice to try it again now, when we can just...focus on how good it is." Steve hums thoughtfully.

"We can appreciate the sun on our faces more now because we don't have to be afraid of what comes next," he says, and Billy is suddenly so grateful for him, for the way he listens and just understands.

"Exactly," he says with a smile, and looks over to see the affection in his eyes reflected in Steve's. Steve gives his hand another squeeze and settles back into his seat.

"So where to?" he asks, looking over at Billy.

"We have stops planned in Half Moon Bay and San Francisco to finish the PCH, and then Napa. After that? Well, we've got time and a nice car. What sounds good to you, pretty boy?"

The question echoes one that Billy asked years ago on the way out of Monterey, Steve smiling at him from the passenger seat of the Camaro, the road stretching out ahead of them, everything new and precarious and terrifying and perfect.

They've lived a lifetime since then, and what's between them hasn't felt precarious in a long time. A lot has changed—there's gray in their hair and they're both softer around the edges than they were back then, in more than one way—but the brightness of Steve's smile at the promise of the road ahead is the same.

Notes for the Chapter:

Me: goes to mark this series as complete, realizes I never actually finished posting this one.
Oops! And here you go.

Author's Note:

Days 14-16: road trip, sun, nostalgia

Oh man. This bad boy threw off my schedule like a bitch. But we're here now! Chapter 2 to come ASAP. It just needs more editing.